



Sermon Growth Guide

October 23, 2022

Freedom Fruit



Sermon Growth Guide

October 23, 2022

Freedom - Freedom Fruit

Galatians 5:16-26

Key Verse: Galatians 5:22-23

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

Big Idea: The fruit of the Spirit brings fullness of life.

Foundations

Paul has been repeatedly stressing the kind of freedom we have in Christ. He really wants us to know that when we are in Christ, we have been set free. We are free from any obligation we may feel that we must earn God's favor.

In this passage, Paul gives us lists of virtues and vices. The list of vices is quite long and like all of Paul's lists, is not exhaustive. So, we cannot read this list and conclude that we're OK if our particular sin doesn't make the list. But we can group these behaviors into four groups: (1) sexual impurity, (2) idolatry, (3) dissension, and (4) intemperance or excess. We commit these sins when we follow the desires of our flesh and not the Spirit of God.

When Paul speaks of the flesh, he is not talking about the *body*. He is speaking of our human nature that has been corrupted and lives on its own, at odds with God.

But when we live in step with the Holy Spirit, we are freed from those personally and relationally destructive behaviors. The result is a freedom to truly love one another and grow a community that bears witness to the fact that life can come out of death. The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the tomb can free us to live a winsome, abundant life, pleasing to Him and caring for one another.

Understanding God's Word

You might have noticed that Paul's lists of behaviors and attitudes in Galatians 5:19-23 are, for the most part, related to our behavior toward one another. Clearly the Galatian slavery to works-righteousness was tearing the community apart. In what ways do you think the fruit of the Spirit would enable the healing of broken relationships? Then, being freed *from* that slavery, what would they be free *for*?

Applying God's Word

You may remember singer/songwriter Bob Dylan's lyrics: “You gotta serve somebody; it may be the devil, or it may be the Lord.” Paul is clear that the fruit of the Spirit will transform our life together. He is also clear that we cannot grow that fruit on our own... that requires reliance on the Holy Spirit.

Paul uses three verbs to describe our relationship to the Spirit: *walk, led, live*. How do you understand those actions in your life?

Witnessing God's Word

“You may be the only Jesus people ever see.” How does loving one another by growing the fruit of the Spirit in our lives make Jesus visible to the world?

For most of the series we have been talking about salvation by grace through faith, not works. We are saved freely. It is a gift of God. We have talked about “freedom from,” but we are only beginning to scratch the surface of “freedom for.” We dipped into it last week. What are we set free for? To what end? To what purpose? What if your life was meant to bear fruit for God? Your life has a purpose, to glorify God, to produce the fruit of the Spirit. A friend asked me early in the series what is my favorite Galatians verse. I think I know. I love Galatians 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). I’m not throwing any shade on that one! I love 5:1, the key verse of the letter by all accounts. We talked about that one last week: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1). But for me, this is the beauty verse. The fruit of the Spirit: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, [patience], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23).

From the very first time I read that verse, I was struck by it. Not only the nine different characters, the nine fruit (singular) of the Spirit of God, the nine characteristics that we know and experience if we abide in Christ, but that last bit. “Against such things there is no law.” There is no law, in any language, in any time, in any culture, there is no law against these things. Love. Joy. Peace. Patience. Kindness. Goodness. Faithfulness. Gentleness. Self-control. No law to oppose them. And if I read it right, no law could ever stand that did. That is freedom. That’s a new kind of free world right there; coordinates for the Kingdom on earth. A world full of that beautiful stuff. A life filled, to the point of hanging on the branch, a life full of beautiful fruit like that. What do you want more of?

Like most of the epistles, Galatians

comes to a list of good and bad, virtue and vice, life-promoting things and life-sucking things. What do you want more of? “The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21). Do you want more of that stuff? Really? Isn’t there enough already? What do you want more of this morning? “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, [patience], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23). How can we get more of that? It’s fruit. That’s an important note. Fruit grows, doesn’t it? How does it grow? It takes vital connection plus time, vital connection plus time. Abide in the vine. Isn’t that what Jesus said? Attach to me. Hold on over time. Let y life flow into your life day after day, week after week, year after year. Fruit will emerge in time, in season.

But roll back to the opening verse of this passage. We’ve been searching for a better freedom, a richer freedom, a better freedom than the silly “free-license” kind of freedoms we find in this world. Fuller freedom than the “do whatever you want” kind of individual, selfish pursuit we find in this world. If I’ve been set free, I have more options. “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free” (Galatians 5:1). That’s true. So what do I do now? “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). Walk by the Spirit. Follow the Spirit. True freedom is found in following, submitting, receiving humble guidance, and walking in and by the Spirit. In a weird way, freedom comes from being bound, being tied, being freely bound to Christ and His Spirit.

G. K. Chesterton told a great parable about freedom in his book, *Orthodoxy*. Imagine a group of travelers who came upon a walled island full of children.



Large stone walls kept the children penned in. The travelers, in a spirit of warm good intent, tore down all those walls. “You don’t need to be trapped in here! This is horrible! We will set you free, children.” They destroyed all the walls and left. Later they returned to check on the kids of Liberation Island. “So long as there was a wall around the cliff’s edge they could fling themselves into every frantic game and make the place the noisiest of nurseries. But the walls were knocked down, leaving the naked peril of the precipice. They did not fall over; but when their friends returned to them they were all huddled in terror in the centre of the island; and their song had ceased.” (G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*) Freedom is not limitlessness. The lines the Lord draws are good. Walk by the Spirit, it says. When we see and recognize the goodness of the lines, the helpfulness of God’s lines, that’s when we really feel the joy of holy freedom in Christ. “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25).

Attaching to the Spirit, abiding in the vine, those are commitments. “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24). That’s major commitment language, to crucify the flesh, the disobedient track, with its passions and desires. That’s commitment. And to go after the desires behind the disobedience. This is such an important point. You can’t just take on the external behaviors and all the while keep your actual passions and desires out of reach of Jesus. That’s like going to a Christian school, and they have a skirt rule, or a shorts length rule or something like that. The girl obeys the rule but all along, in her heart she hates it. She hates that rule. In her obedience, there is nothing of a relationship with God, nothing of an understanding of a God who loves her and knows her, nothing growing in her of a value for modesty or a growing confidence that her identity is hidden in Christ and her value has nothing to do with how she looks or all that. None of that is happening. Just external obedience and internal rebellion. That’s toxic!

But if you let Jesus touch the desires, if you let the Spirit rule the actual passions, if you ask the Lord to crucify all of it, “the flesh with its passions and desires,” you will find your heart pursuing Jesus. See that? God doesn’t want your robotic obedience; God wants your heart. When your heart is His, you will know a new freedom. That’s major commitment language. That’s not “keep your options open” language. That’s decisive. If you want to see the fruit emerge, it takes vital connection plus time. Attach and commit to the Lord. Walk in step with the Spirit. Fruit grows when there is attachment and commitment. Those are not words you usually associate with freedom. Attachment and commitment bring the fruit.

David Brooks, in a commencement address to Dartmouth College in 2015, said the most important thing in life is not to keep all your options open. Brooks said it was what they chose to commit to that really mattered: “We are not a society that nurtures commitment-making. We live in a culture that puts a lot of emphasis on individual liberty and freedom of choice... keeping your options open and fear of missing out. We live in a society filled with decommitment devices. Tinder, OkCupid, Instagram, Reddit; the entire internet is commanding you to sample one thing after another. Our phones are always beckoning us to shift our attention span. If you can’t focus your attention for 30 seconds, how can you make a commitment for life? But your fulfillment in life will not come from how well you explore your freedom and keep your options open. That’s the path to a frazzled, scattered life in which you try to please everyone and end up pleasing no one. Your fulfillment in life will come by how well you end your freedom. By the time you hit your 30s, you will realize that your primary mission in life is to be really good at making commitments. Taking a job is not a moral act. Going on a date is not a moral act. Having a vocation is a moral act. Entering a 30- or 50-year marriage is a moral act. Making a commitment is a moral act...It’s the things you chain yourself to that set you free.”



True happiness doesn't come from a thousand options, but from a few good commitments. "It's the things you chain yourself to that set you free." How about that? That's upside down, isn't it? What if you attach and commit to the Lord? Commit to walk by the Spirit wherever He leads? Could that be a better freedom? I tell you, you will find yourself freer than you ever imagined when you make that turn. Living out God's purposes for your life. It will look like bondage to the world; it will look like you chose a very narrow line. But you will know a freedom like you never imagined.

In Egypt a few weeks ago, I showed you a picture of Rebecca Atallah. Rebecca came to Egypt as a young, single woman who had come up in a wealthy family in Canada. In the 1970s, she visited Garbage Village. [picture shown here] What the picture doesn't deliver is the smell. Can you imagine it? It doesn't convey the heavy air, or the flies, or the tight walls. Can you imagine some of that? Imagine committing your life to that place. Of all the places in the world, committing your life to that place. What would make you do such a thing? As my friend Steven Garber says, "None of us can care for everything everywhere; so we choose to care about something somewhere." Commitment. What would make you commit your life to this place, this people? I wonder if there were days over the last 50 years when Rebecca remembered her childhood in Canada and doubted or wondered. Do you think so? But by committing to this place, these people, this thing, beautiful fruit has emerged. Do you see it in her eyes? I'm not saying she lives in the glow of transcendent happiness every moment! Work in this world is hard! But there is happiness, there is joy. There is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Where is Christ calling you to make an attachment? To make a commitment? And to follow through until the fruit emerges? Next week we will bring our stewardship commitment cards forward and leave them on a table in the front of the church. What is that all

about? It's about learning to make a commitment. A few good commitments. An attachment. Vital attachment plus time. First Pres is not the flashiest Christian effort in the world, but if there is one thing the Lord has demonstrated here, it is the fruit of vital attachment plus time. And your church needs your commitment. This ministry needs all of our commitments to carry on and meet the challenges. We have asked of the Lord in every area of ministry, and done our best to peer into 2023, and we are setting a budget goal for all the ministries of First Pres next year of 8 million dollars, up from 7.5 million this year. That is almost a 7 percent increase. A big portion of that goes outside our walls (usually over 15 percent). What we commit this week can make that possible. God is calling First Pres to persevere in this place. A million options, or a vital attachment, a defined commitment—which will bear fruit? I ask you to pray and commit. See if you don't find more of the Freedom Fruit of the Spirit.



Freedom